

THE SECULARIZATION OF THE
12th-13th CENTURY UNIVERSITY AND
THE RISE OF THE PROFESSIONAL BUREAUCRAT

JOHN W. LYONS

INTRODUCTION

The twelfth century witnessed a subtle revolution within the universities of Western Europe. An educational realignment was underway which would ultimately re-shape the structure of feudalism and give birth to modern administrative government. The cause for this radical change would be the rise of the university educated, professional, bureaucrat.

This paper will concern itself with the developments which led up to that critical point in time where the medieval university ceased to produce students exclusively for the needs of the church and began to produce students educated to aid the secular ruler in the administration of his government. The origins of this movement will also be examined: the economic revival of Western Europe; the fortuitous rediscovery of Roman law; and the growth of royal power as the monarch's revenues increased during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. All of these would help to bring about the administrative revolution which made possible the growth of nation-states beyond their tenth century limitations. Such a movement, the consolidation of vast amounts of territory under a central authority, which characterized fourteenth and fifteenth century rule, would not have been possible.

The first half of this paper will be devoted to an overview of the early European educational system, such as there was, which existed from the fifth through eleventh centuries. The second half will document the developments of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and their effects on the rising class of professional, university-trained civil servants.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, such organized education as existed all but disappeared. The Germanic invaders had neither an interest in nor a need for an orderly educational system. Such learning that survived the collapse of central authority fell into the hands of the rising institution of the Church, which alone possessed a body of already educated men who were capable of passing learning on.

The few Monastic schools which survived provided their students with a very haphazard education at best. Priests often barely knew enough Latin, to say the Mass; spelling and grammar were poor to say the least. Nevertheless, from the fifth to seventh century it was the only form of education available—education at a subsistence level to be sure, but education none the less.

These early schools were rural in nature and local in scope, rarely attracting students from beyond the surrounding farm communities. For the most part they served as chantry, or song, schools whose major purpose was to provide young choirsters with enough education to read Latin, and enough grammar and vocabulary to sing the church liturgies with the proper emphasis and expression. Most graduates of these schools would remain with the monastic order and eventually became instructors to future pupils.¹ The role of Monastic schools then was quite clear: to provide a convenient form of mass education designed for fulfilling the needs of the Church.

The first winds of change began to be felt in the eighth century with the re-establishment of a degree of order in the West under the Frankish Carolingian Kings. The great Frankish leader Charles Martel was not particularly interested in education, or the Church. Indeed, he often showed considerable hostility to the interests of the Frankish Church by appropriating its property to finance his military ventures.

With the ascension of his son Pippin the Short to the throne in 752 as the first recognized Carolingian King, all of this changed. He and his brother Carloman became avid supporters of the Papacy and took the lead in restoring discipline to the Frankish Church through the regular convening of Church synods. This renewed strength and organization within the Church would provide the basis for the educational reforms undertaken by Charlemagne, who succeeded Pippin in 768.

Charlemagne's great task was to reconstruct an educational system within his empire, something which had not existed since Roman times. To accomplish this, he first needed to improve the intellectual level of the average parish priest, who was the mainstay of education. Acting in concert with the Pope, Charlemagne worked hard to curb the widespread illiteracy rampant among the clergy and to encourage all intellectuals within the empire to work for the creation of good government within the realm. By this action alone, Charlemagne became the first ruler in the Middle Ages to recognize that a link existed between efficient government and educated men.

In 796, in a letter to Bishop Bagulf of Fulda intended for publication, Charlemagne commanded that each Bishop should establish within his diocese a school for all, regardless of their origins. To what extent he was obeyed is unknown, but as he was the most powerful monarch in over five hundred years, it is probable that he was obeyed by most.²

The most famous school established during his reign was at Orleans under the great Visigothic scholar Theodulf. The main obstacle he had to overcome was the attraction of good teachers, still a difficult task today but even more so in the eighth century. Even if they could be found, generous compensation was required to attract and keep them, something Charlemagne did not hesitate to provide.

In addition to public schools, Charlemagne also sought to establish a school of government for the ruling elite. His predecessors had used the Palace school at Achen to provide military training for the sons of noblemen. Now it was to become the intellectual center of the empire - a scholarly task force turning out government officials capable of carrying out the major reforms and projects of Charlemagne's reign.

Clearly his interest in education was profound: not only was Charlemagne genuinely interested in learning for its own sake, but he also saw the connection between educated administrators and the efficient rule of his widespread domains.

The Carolingian intellectualism spawned by Charlemagne reached its peak under his son, Louis the Pious, in the ninth century. By this time many of the graduates of the Palace school were playing important roles in the governing of the empire. Two men stand out: Einhart, who studied under Alcuin at Achen, worked out the process whereby Louis became Co-Emperor with his father to ensure the succession; and Angilbert, also of Achen, who became the primicerius palatti, or prime advisor, to Charlemagne's son Pippin, and lead several important diplomatic missions to Rome. Both were excellent examples in the flesh of what Charlemagne hoped to achieve on a larger scale.³

The next century saw a dramatic improvement in the quality of Monastic schools. New order of monks breathed new life into the Benedictine order; literacy among the lower clergy began to rise; new Popes began to reform the whole fabric of Church organization. Along with the internal strengthening of the monastic system, the political climate in Europe began to improve. The Norse invaders were becoming assimilated; Islamic and Magyar thrusts into the continent were checked one by one.

By the eleventh century a period of relative peace and prosperity begins to settle upon Europe. The result is an increasing population, leading in turn to a growth in towns and cities as trade and commerce revives, especially after the success of the first Crusades. With the growth of urban areas came an increase in the revenues paid to the King. Their power consequently began to increase with the rise of the bourgeoisie.

The Church also profitted from this new urbanization. Gradually the rural Monastic schools were supplanted by the growing urban Cathedral schools, administered by the city Bishops. As with the Monastic schools, the Cathedral schools existed to serve the local needs of the Church: to equip the higher ranks of the Clergy with learning useful to the needs of the Church. It too was local in scope - it did not draw students from afar as it did not have the resources of students and teachers to do so.⁴

By the end of the eleventh century, Cathedral schools were beginning to take the first steps beyond the traditional church-oriented education. They were forced into doing this by the increasing demands of local burghers for a more commercially oriented education including such secular subjects as arithmetic and foreign languages. The result was that Cathedral schools began to provide education for the businessmen of the city; the same type of personnel that the growing Monarchies would come to recognize as invaluable to their interests as well.⁵

The most renowned of the Cathedral schools was at Chartres. Its curriculum included the seven liberal arts, those being divided into the Trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic), and Quadrivium (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy). Medicine and law were added in the early twelfth century as the demands of the middle class grew. Chartres was one of the first Cathedral schools to concern itself with worldly as well as other-worldly studies.⁶

Yet increasingly this was not enough. In spite of the general Christian belief in the supremacy of the Church over the State, the State was becoming an entity unto itself. Monarchs were slowly extending their sovereignty over their domains, pushing into the background the old feudal lords who had for so long held sway. This new found political clout was a direct result of the growing economic revival which created a money economy that provided the King with a means of enforcing law and order through the creation of a Royal Army paid for by taxes from the bourgeoisie. The interests of the Monarchy and the rising middle class artisans and merchants were thus firmly joined.

By the early twelfth century, the town Guilds began to establish their own "Grammar schools" to concentrate upon providing a commercial education beyond that being provided by the most progressive Cathedral school. These locally financed schools became a source of municipal pride. A new type of educational institution was in the process of being born, one that would make all the others obsolete: the university.⁷

The exact origins of the university system is unknown but they seemed to have coalesced around pre-existing town schools or from groups of students gathering around distinguished teachers. It is interesting to note that in no source could I find any mention of a university evolving from a Cathedral school. The Church seems to have played no part in their origins, although it did actively seek to maintain control over their administration.

However as the twelfth century progressed, the supremacy of the Church in matters of education would increasingly be infringed upon. All learning was ultimately subject to the jurisdiction of the Pope. It was fortunate

that the early twelfth century Pontiffs were not hostile to the university; indeed they would be encouraged and protected from local ecclesiastical authorities by the Popes. Although complete academic freedom was not allowed, the Papacy did, to a surprising degree, allow university teachers to study controversial subjects such as classical and Islamic thought, and more important to this paper, civil law.⁸

It is the introduction of the systematic study of law that would delineate the university from the Monastic and Cathedral school and which would inaugurate the marriage of education and bureaucracy.

The first university was established at Salerno in Italy towards the end of the twelfth century. The first known recorded use of the word itself occurs in a letter written by Pope Innocent III in 1208 or 1209. University itself refers only to the student body as a whole, "the corporation" of students following Salerno, universities were established at Bologna, Paris, and Montpellier. As noted under the more liberal authority of the Popes.⁹ However, Kings increasingly sought to control them. For example, Phillip Augustus issued a royal Charter to the University of Paris in 1200, without which it was forbidden to operate. But nowhere was this royal control more in evidence than in England.

Of all the European countries, England was the one where the King had the means to substantially enforce his will. He was also fortunate in that the English Church wanted nothing to do with the new university system. Not only were their students deemed unruly but there were serious problems over who had legal jurisdiction over them - the Pope, the Bishop, or the King? The English clergy also saw no need to provide a higher education: once a religious education had been instilled in a student, the Church's job was over.

All of these factors would combine to insure that royal patronage would be the driving force behind the English university system. Cambridge was established in 1209 by exiles from Paris and promptly chartered by the King; Oxford was established by royal proclamation in 1265. In one royal edict, Henry III admonished his people:

"You are aware that a multitude of scholars from diverse parts, as well from this side the sea as from overseas, meets at our town of Cambridge for study, which we hold a very gratifying and desirable thing, since no small benefit and glory occurs therefrom to our whole realm; and you, among whom these students personally live, ought especially to be pleased and delighted by it."¹⁰

By 1265, the ruling noblemen and merchant families were sending their children to Oxford. Already the universities were becoming the training ground for the governmental and business leaders of England.

However, it was in Italy, at Bologna, that the true impact of University secularization would be felt with the rediscovery of Roman law, the Corpus Juris Civilis of Justinian, and all the ramifications for Kingship that it entailed. The concept of law had never vanished from the European consciousness, even during the Dark Ages, but it was Barbarian law-the Leges barbarorum-the product of Germanic tribal customs interspersed with fragments of Roman law and Church teachings. It was not the product of a professional civil service, and as such not amiable to the creation of one.

Around 1100, Irnerius of Bologna had revived the study of Roman Imperial law and created a coelified body of secular law from it. By 1140, an organized body of Canon law was composed by the Bolognese monk Gratian, the Decretum grattani. The two systems of opposing bodies of law had come into existence within a generation of each other within the twelfth century. A new legal science, based on a scientific interpretation of Imperial law, was soon to become autonomous and a major challenge to theology.

Increasingly the Ars Dictancli, that class of university trained men skilled in writting legal communications, were becoming the dominant administrative functionaries. There was a growing need for their services at all levels-chancery, ambassidorial, commercial, bureacratic, and personal." Universities quickly grew to meet the demands of this promising and lucrative field.

By the first decade of the thirteenth century, six universities had been established in Europe-Salerno, Bologna, Montpellier, Reggio, Paris, and Oxford. By the end of the century, eight more had been founded in Italy; five in Spain and Portugal; three in France; and one in England. By the end of the fourteenth century, twenty-two more had been established in Europe; five of which were in the German states. By 1500, six universities had increased to eighty.¹²

By the thirteenth century, government and law would be administered by trained professional men, resulting in a radical restructuring of feudal society. Jurists and bureaucrats would supplant the old feudal lords as the King's administrators and advisors. Indeed, a third class of Knighthood would be created-the militia Legum (Knighthood of Law) and the Militia Litterata or Doctoralis (Knighthood of Letters)-just to reward them.¹³

The Church did not view this growth favorably. This new law, based on the principle of Imperial, not Papal, authority was a challenge to the supremacy of Church over State. It inspired a demand for civil, not Canon, lawyers by rulers who needed their advice and paid them well for it. By the end of the thirteenth century Cynus of Prstoria could say with pride:

"Thou seest, oh student, how much the (legal) science... makes the jurisprudent a father and friend of the Princes."¹⁴

This was a decisive blow. In the old days a King and his chief lords had seen to the welfare of the realm. Now a professional, university-trained staff supervised the administration of government. The new science of Law greatly aided the monarch in the systematizing of feudal ideas and the organization of strong central government. The idea of the State, as being represented in the person of the King and His Royal Government, was being translated into a reality.

For his part, the monarch now moved to complete his control of the universities which were proving so vital to his power: he issued charters essential to their operation; certified the degrees granted to their graduates; and even approved the appointments of their instructors. The Duke of Burgundy even founded a Collegiate Church (Chapelle-le-Duc) in 1184 just to train clerks for his government.¹⁵ The anonymous author of the medieval essay "commendation of the Clerk" takes a moment in his writing to point this out:

"An authentic school is one whose studies are laudably founded on Apostolic privileges and Imperial liberties...an illegitimate school is one of slight reputation, lacking privileges from the Princes of the World."¹⁶

The Bureaucrat, with his love of legalism, his devotion to record keeping and his insistence on using the proper forms, had arrived. For better or worse, depending upon your point of view, he remains with us today.

CONCLUSION

The development of a professional, university-trained bureaucracy, specializing in judicial, governmental, and financial administration resulted in a world of difference between the efficiency of eleventh and thirteenth century government.

In the former century, a lord had only a few, church-school trained clerks to assist him. His vassals were engaged in military service and his few clerks, though at least literate, had little experience in administration. For this reason his government had effective control only over local areas. A lord who sought to control a larger territory would have had to delegate authority, something he did not dare do for fear of establishing a rival lordship to his own.

By the thirteenth century, university-trained administrators had changed all of this. With their help, his administration produced better record keeping; fixed legal procedures which gradually superseded informal customs and courts; greater revenues which swelled his treasury due to more efficient tax collection.

With increased revenue came increased authority. As Kings and great lords became wealthier, they acquired more university-trained clerks, something which the lesser lords could not afford to do, thus weakening their positions.

By the thirteenth century's end, every King could clearly see that the growth of his power and the well-being of his realm depended upon the skill of the bureaucrats produced by his universities.¹⁷

WORKS CITED

¹Morris Bishop, The Middle Ages (1968; New York, N.Y.: American Heritage Press, 1985) 238.

²Richard C. Dales, The Intellectual Life of Western Europe in the Middle Ages (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1980) 73-74.

³Ibid, 87.

⁴R. W. Southern, Medieval Humanism and Other Studies (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1970) 74.

⁵Josiah C. Russel, Twelfth Century Studies (New York, N.Y.: AMS Press, 1978) 104.

⁶Morris Bishop, The Middle Ages (1968; New York, N.Y.: American Heritage Press, 1985) 239.

⁷Richard C. Dales, The Intellectual Life of Western Europe in the Middle Ages (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1980) 145-146.

⁸Marshall Clagett, Gaines Post, and Robert Reynolds, introduction, Twelfth Century Europe and the Foundations of Modern Society (Madison, Milwaukee, and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966) IX.

⁹Morris Bishop, The Middle Ages (1968; New York, N.Y.: American Heritage Press, 1985) 240.

¹⁰Josiah C. Russel, Twelfth Century Studies (New York, N.Y.: AMS Press, 1978) 174.

¹¹Richard C. Dales, The Intellectual Life of Western Europe in the Middle Ages (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, Inc. 1980) 287-88.

¹²Bede Jarret, Social Theories of the Middle Ages: 1200-1500 (1926; New York, N.Y.: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1966) 46.

¹³Ernest H. Kantorowicz, "Kingship under Impact of Scientific Jurisprudence," Twelfth Century Europe and the Foundations of Modern Society, ed. Marshall Clagett, Gaines Post, and Robert Reynolds (Madison, Milwaukee, and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966) 89-92

¹⁴Ibid, 92

¹⁵Joseph R. Strayer, "The Development of Feudal Institutions," Twelfth Century Europe and the Foundations of Modern Society, ed. Marshall Clagett, Gaines Post, and Robert Reynolds (Madison, Milwaukee, and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966) 85.

¹⁶Anonymous, "The Commendation of the Clerk," The Medieval World and its Transformations: 800-1650, ed. Gerald M. Straka (New York, N.Y.: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967) 245.

WORKS CITED, CONTINUED

¹⁷Joseph R. Strayer, "The Development of Feudal Institutions," Twelfth Century Europe and the Foundations of Modern Society, ed. Marshall Clogett, Gains Pot, and Robert Reynolds (Madison, Milwaukee, and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966) 84-85.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bishop, Morris. The middle Ages. 1968. New York, N.Y.: American Heritage Press, 1968.
- Clagett, Marshall Gains Post and Robert Reynolds. Twelfth Century Europe and the Foundations of Modern Society. Madison, Milwaukee, and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966.
- Cook, William B. and Ronald Heyman. The Medieval World view. New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Dales, Richard C. The Intellectual Life of Western Europe in the Middle Ages. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1980.
- Jarrett, Bede. 1926. Social Theories of the Middle Ages: 1200-1500. 1926. New York, N.Y.: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1966.
- Russell, Josiah C. Twelfth Century Studies. New York, N.Y.: AMS Press, 1978.
- Southern, Medieval Humanism. New York, N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1970.
- Straka, Gerald M. The Medieval World and its Transformations: 800-1650. New York, N.Y.: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967.